

THE DEATH OF MAID McCREA

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O.C. AURINGER

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THE DEATH OF MAID MCCREA

BY
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"The Road Builders," "Friendship's Crown
of Verse," etc., etc.*



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DEDICATION

TO THE DAUGHTERS OF THE
AMERICAN REVOLUTION

THESE TWIN TRAGEDIES
ARE DEDICATED BY
THE AUTHOR

1909

THE DEATH OF MAID McCREA

THE DEATH OF MAID McCREA

(SAMUEL STANDISH, NARRATOR)

We left the camp behind us coiled in sleep,
And moved with quiet footfalls to the plain.
We paused a moment at the sentry's hail,
And answering passed on. We left the road,
The broad way from the fortress trailing
north,
And fell in file along a slender path
That ribbonded the plain and river-marsh,
O'erwaved a mount with shaggy growths
bespread
And crowned with pines and silence, spinning
thence
Still forth amid the wildwood's tangled
glooms,
On to a ruined blockhouse on the hill.
There lay the ground we were to seize and
keep
From scout or foray of our lion foe
Crouched in a thorny jungle in the north.

A score of men we were, armed woodman-like
With musket, knife and hatchet,—every one
A soul well seasoned in the storms of war—
Sons of the sword, ambitious for the task—
Led by a dark lieutenant, silent, stern,
But oaken-souled and loved by every man,

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The trustiest in the camp. With scarce a
 sound
We moved in line along the narrow path,
Dipped from the plain and pierced the river-
 marsh,
And steeped in moonshine and hot airs of
 night,
Set knees against the black acclivity,
And gave ourselves to that wild wilderness.

We climbed the steep ascent with guns atrail,
Picking our steps amid the roots and stones
That lurked along the pathway. As we
 moved,
A trailing breach, with mischievous intent
Would greet aloud some object on the way,
Sending a sudden thrill along the file;
And oft again some imp-inveigled foot
Would slip and bring a soldier to his knee,
Or send him reeling sidelong from the path,
Mayhap to catch and cling by shrub or limb
And sway his body back in line again,
And onward as before. And presently
A man would stop stock-still adown the file,
Smote in the face by some lithe hazel rod
That, bent unwillingly and springing back,
Stung like a whip. Then would an oath
 break forth—
Strangled at birth; and followed in its turn
A laugh or joke in cautious undertones
At his expense who suffered from the blow—
Danger just seasoned with a spice of fun,

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And no one made the worse, so all was still.
For we were men trained not to utter sound
Above necessity when foes were nigh
Like those that girt us now.

Above the plain

Two mounts arose—steps of titanic stairs
Leading to nothing, cancelling the wild
And wondrous star-blown spaces of the
North.

And on the foremost couched a narrow plot
By jealous spirits stolen from the wilds,
Gone bare of trees, but richly carpeted
With soft green moss and silent. And it lay
Kept three sides round with spears of hazel-
wood

Enwoven in a wild vine's running skein.
And dark beside its brink an aged pine
Rose huge amid the blackness, and on high
Parting, held forth a magic canopy,
Mysterious o'er the moss-hushed forest floor.
And down amid his roots a virgin spring
Trembling and shy broke through the leaves
and moss,

Hung wavering in the shadow for a space,
Then fled in pearl and silver down the slope.

This was the ancient pine, and this the
spring,
And here the spot renowned in all the world.
And here we halted breathing hard; and
here,

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With studied charge and order from the
chief—

A message out of darkness in the ear—
I took my place beside the aged pine
To watch till morning; and my friends filed
on,

Vague bulks in darkness streaming o'er the
plot,

Along the dim and vanishing ascent,
Forth to the ancient blockhouse on the hill.

A long and lonesome watch beside that tree—
Long watch and lonesome; wide in darkness
spread

The night-lone lanscape round and far
away—

A wilderness gone dreaming, with the moon,
Stars, silent-pacing clouds and stealthy airs
Alert above it. And beneath, alert,
Their fellow guard and watchman of the
night,

I with my weapon and a lonely heart,
But willingly, kept uncomplaining hours,
For manly honor's sake, and liberty.

The night hung slumberous, yet one must
keep

His senses mustered round him—no clear
task

With naught to keep him wakeful but to
watch—

Just watch and wait the sluggish moments
through

And listen. And to venture past the bounds,

The plot prescribed of safe and level ground,
 To move about and feel oneself at large—
 Forbidden grace! To make companionship
 With one's own pleasant inner impulses
 By singing songs as soldiers love to do,
 Or whistling to call up the merry thoughts
 To charm an idle watch—most perilous!
 Our foes were wary ears on every side,
 Fear figured armed warriors in the oaks,
 And shaped fantastic foemen from the rocks,
 And made the light leaves turning in their
 dreams
 Seem to the ear a gliding Indian's tread.

A soldier's mind hoards small philosophy
 Among his treasures, woo it as he will;
 A life of shocks breaks up the course of
 thought
 And checks it midway. Contemplation, shy,
 Recluse and sensitive, starts from the sound
 Of war's on-coming murmur militant,
 And at roar of his impetuous rush
 Gathers her things about her daintily
 And vanishes;—guard! is the soldier's watch-
 word!

And yet he has his fancies, often sweet,
 Dreams dreams and has ambitions of his own,
 Most welcome, though so oft they come to
 naught.

He has his store of stirring memories
 Laid up through years of strange vicissitude,
 Of camps and marches, roaring battle fields,

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Shipwrecks at sea, disasters on the shore,
Perils, escapes—all memorable things
To lighten up the long hours of a watch.
All these my mind tossed o'er, then fled away,
Heart-piloted beyond the wilderness,
And visited beside the Eastern sea
A humble fisher-town 'twixt sands and crags
Withdrawn apart—a butt for bluff sea winds,
And salt-sharp storms flung inland from the
main.

There stood a house I knew of, with its door
Laid open to the tossed sea waves, with sand,
And wreck and waste of many a stormy tide
Thrown near it. And I saw upon the beach
My three sweet motherless children hard at
play

With all their little sea-things; fairy boats,
Laden with fairy thoughts imaginative,
Launched bravely from their hands with
mingled cries

Of hope and apprehension;—"See, she
floats!"

"She's down, she's gone!—Nay, there she
comes again!"

"How sweetly she sails on now! We will call
Her name The Lucky Sailor, for good luck!"
And then they wave their hands and cry in the
wind—

"Luck to the Lucky Sailor!" o'er the foam.

Back flashed my thought, and then forth out
of earth,

Or visionary starlight, airy space,
 Or fairyland of beauty, none knows where,
 A phantom face rose softly on my sight
 Glimpsed in an air ideal, like a star;
 More rare for loveliness than eye beholds
 Ever amid this solemn loneliness
 Forsaken of fair things. And it appeared
 Arrayed for wonder and magnificence
 In one long living garment of bright hair,
 Like that which waves 'mid webs of charmed
 romance,

Magical tales and legends all forlorn
 Imagined in old time, to net the heart,
 And draw it happy captive through the tale.
 And then my lips obedient spoke aloud
 A name in the darkness, with such vehemence
 As made me start alarmed, and throw around
 Eyes apprehensive. But the loyal night,
 Darkly discreet, gave not the sound away
 To alien senseless ears. It was a name
 Since famous in the annals of the land,
 Which heard it cried round its circumference
 Till it became a charm to conjure with,
 A watchword and a symbol on men's tongues;
 Even till a banner blazoned with that name,
 And borne from town to town throughout the
 land,

By close accord might gather to itself
 How many a thousand gallant hearts and
 swords

Pledged to the height of heavenly sacrifice
 For love's fair sake, and country's liberty.

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And in that name what individual acts
Have been accomplished! I have known the
soul
Lukewarm in hope and courage take quick
fire,
And burn to noble death beneath its spell.
And I have known the base and dissolute,
The wretch that fought for plunder, harden-
ed men—
Cold soldiers by profession, noisy spirits,
Burlesques of heroes, lions in the camp
And lambs in battle,—I have known all these
To change their very nature at that name,
And in the day of opportunity
Prove heroes all, and terrible in fight,
Heap fame and honor and proud victory
Upon themselves and country!

But these things
Were yet unknown, unborn; the burning deed
Yet lingered that would consecrate that name,
Baptize it in warm blood, and send it forth
On its miraculous mission through the world.
That name?—What name sings sweetest in
our ears
And lingers, save the name of Maid McCrea?

But by-and-by the morning! 'Twas the pipe
Of bird, I think, that first announced the
dawn
From some near tree—a loud and buoyant
strain,

Clear-resonant, as if the dear musician
 Had captured some keen courier-note of dawn
 And flung it forth in glory as bright news.
 And at that sound pipe after pipe broke forth
 Voluptuous from that hill of harmony,
 Until a thousand rapturous throats were
 strained
 To hail the coming banners of the dawn.
 And then came morning marching slowly,
 slowly,
 Up o'er the land.

 Low down along the plain
 Reposed the fortress ramparts coiled in dusk,
 Beside whose hillocks rolled the Hudson's
 stream
 Pouring with all his thousands from the hills,
 With rustle and murmur of his million feet.
 He moved unseen beneath the ghostly
 stream
 Of flowing vapor shadowing his march
 Far on into the southland like a dream.

But broader burned the red along the east,
 And fainter waxed the veil that dimmed the
 wood,
 As swept the light to westward o'er the
 world;
 It touched the hills and they arose, unmasked,
 And beamed afar with genial visages,
 And in a moment o'er the wilderness

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Flushed the broad sun! a swimming fount
of fire

That poured its streams across the solitudes
Till glory kindled to their utmost bounds.
His rays dissolved the mists along the
stream,

And set the water sparkling; gilt the sands,
Hung webs of golden gauze about the hills,
And woke anew the music of the birds

In thicket deep and treetop everywhere—
O 'twas a sight worth one long watch to see,
That world-old battle of the day with night,
Wherein the day is glorious conqueror.

And I remember how I stood and drank
My fill of that fresh fountain all alive,
Till all my heart pronounced the thing divine!

A distant drum-pulse throbbing from the
plain

And chiming with my heart-pulse pleasantly,
O'erspilled the cup of rapture in my soul.

It ceased,—a curl fantastic of fierce smoke
Gushed forth a sudden cloud upon the plain,
And out the fort spoke through its early
gun,

Telling the world of morning. And the
sound,

Recoiling, passed and fell among the hills
Crashing; as when a storm-cloud from the
west

Discharges its first volley o'er the earth,
Rending the ancient stillness of the woods.

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Making the heart leap up in beast and man,
While all the trees a bashful silence keep
In all their leaves. And then in mimicry
A hundred echoes seizing on the theme
Ran babbling it the greenwood arches
through,
Hither and thither flying through the wilds,
With voices blowing ever faint and fainter,
Far off and farther, dying on the airs
That breathed from out the solitudes.

For me,
Yet one long hour before relief would come.
I leaned upon my weapon and looked down
Upon the narrow vista of the plain,
Where war had drawn some furrows of light
soil
And planted them with cannon. There had
men
Built for themselves rude homes in which to
dwell
And till their narrow slips of yellow earth,
And hunt and fish and barter, nested there
Beneath the fostering pinions of the fort,—
Each cottage with its tributary lawn,
Beds of rare roses, yellow marigolds,
And lilacs shadowing doorways with their
green,
Their blooms now fallen; still where friendly
birds
All summer sang and nested 'mid their
boughs.

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And there were people moving in my sight
About their morning tasks—a pleasant thing,
As I remember how it moved me then,—
Some gleaning wood to start their early fires,
And some with yoke and bucket and long
toil

Who brought fresh water from the river's
brink,

Or drove their cattle forth amid the dew
To some deep forest pasture out of sight.

And over and beyond, a pigmy crew,
Ridiculous in distance as they moved

On errands lost to all but conscious eyes,
My camp-mates and companions in the war,

A few from off their banquet-board of sand
Quaffing their early dram of heavenly air;

Half-naked gunners on the parapets,

Toiling away like demons in the fire

Of the red sun; and creeping on his post

The drowsy sentinel—gun and bayonet

Molten to fire and splendor as he turned;

Or servants from the stables leading forth

With halters slack the train of thirsty beasts

To water, where the river lapped the sand.

And I remember, too, most humanly,

How good the cookhouse smoke seemed to
my eyes,

And how the thoughts of breakfast cheered
me up,

And all the genial messroom company

One has in barracks.

But beholding these
 I saw not all the vision of the time;
 And truly such a wealthy-hearted morning
 Was pledge enough of fairer things to come
 Than homely-woven scenes with villagers
 Slow shuttling through; or stuff of fireier
 grain
 Embossed with pictures of armed battle-
 ments
 And warlike figures;—something for a crown
 Of this fair morning kingdom in the land.
 O happy eyes to see that pledge fulfilled!
 O prosperous time! For on the glimmering
 hem
 Of the gay forest robe that clothed the camp,
 A something, charmed with airy grace and
 motion,
 Something akin to sunrise and fresh dews
 And winds and blowing roses of the wilds—
 A gleam of morning—crossed my longing
 sight
 Borne lightly onward. It was where the
 waves,
 Penned in a cove that balked their onward
 rush,
 Like sheep pressed in confusion and complain-
 ed,
 Striking the sand and shrinking in recoil,
 Pressing back on their fellows timidly,
 As if they feared to tread the shining sands
 That knew their footprints through unnum-
 bered years.

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I saw it break the shadow of the wood,
And dawn another sunrise on the camp,
Just touching it in passing. Where the fort
Thrust out a threatening angle toward the
stream,

Its fairy-woven footsteps met the path—
The way our feet had taken—wafted on
Across the meadows, like a morning cloud
Dewing the earth behind it as it goes.
I watched it hushed, as one so often will,
Who stands and cranes his neck and holds his
breath

To note the outcome of some ventured guess
As if 'twere life or death. And so my heart
Held wager with my eyes who this might be
Coming so lightly. 'Twas a woman's shape
Coming so sweetly!—sight in soldier's eyes
Most prized of all in this great wilderness
Because so rare and transient.

“It is

she!”

Some influence runs before and cries rejoicing,—

Some courier of the heart—“Yes, it is she!”
And the eye answers—“Nay, it is not she!
The gay apparel, the unstately pace,
The unseemly season—'tis some other she!”
But meanwhile like that cloud she floated on,
And came unto a cabin reared of logs
Piled roughly in their bark, and covered o'er
With faded forest branches. Low it stood

Amid the outmost circle of rude homes,
 A humble little dwelling, with its door
 Swung open to the morning, and a curl
 Of friendly smoke above its chimney stack.
 And to the door the maid of morning came
 And knocked. And from the dwelling came
 a dame

Of fair and liberal port, and courteously
 Took by the hand the early visitant
 And led her in—a robber of my right!
 They passed away from sight, but ere they
 went,

A curl of laughter floated up to me
 Upon the air of morning sweetly borne.
 And then my heart laid claim upon my eyes
 For one more wager won! And it was true,
 Even as my heart had said! And this was she,
 The famous, lovely, luckless Maid McCrea,
 Whose face had set such martial hearts
 aflake,

Whose mournful fate has set the world on
 fire!

And I was glad at heart to have her near,
 And thanked the sunny morning in my soul,
 Blessed the soft airs, the odors of the wood,
 Rejoiced in all the summer-nested scene
 With forms of fellow men, so much her pres-
 ence

Gladdened the glittering world. . . .

But

 suddenly
 All pleasure died within me as my soul,

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By some mysterious instinct like a hound,
Caught a fleet scent of evil in the air,
Far off or hovering. Ah, what airy dream,
What sweet unwisdom had enticed her forth
Arrayed as for her bridal, with the sun,
To seek an enemy's lodge? I knew the dame,
A brave kind lady, but in sentiment
A Royalist outspoken from the soul;—
Our boasted gem strayed to this treasury
Of treason, with her lover hovering nigh
In ardent circles from the English camp,
Perchance prepared to speed with sudden
wing

To pluck it thence and wear it on his heart
Before her friends and mine—the feeble few
Who held the fort—for 'twas a conquered
land!

What spirit had lured her forth at such a time
Of watch and danger? Was it possible
She dreamed to quit the shelter of the camp,
And home and friends and all the gallant
guard

Of hearts and weapons leagued in her defence,
For that dark tract of wilderness, beset
By such too-well-known perils—all for a sight
Of one mad boy in uniform! Alas,
If she had only known! Had only known!
Had but her feet kept their old paths that
day!

A wild sound broke upon me, like a peal
Of cannon to a soldier in his dreams

Calling him up to battle, ere the light.
 A sullen crash of rifles overhead
 Tore up the air around me, as a gale
 Rips a strained tent; then rose a cry so wild,
 So savage that my heart stopped at the sound
 An instant in its wonted harmony,
 Then leapt with one wild impulse, and a
 shock
 That rocked the brain in its strong citadel.
 Ah, well I understood that fatal cry—
 The horrible cry all mad and animal,
 The wild dishevelled courier of surprise
 And all the rush and tumult of the pack!
 Out from the bosom of a gaunt ravine
 It rose, that cleft the hilltop with a gash
 Of some old torrent-stroke of ages gone,
 Now rolling down a flood of fiery hate
 Upon my hapless comrades of the watch!
 Downward the cloud of battle swept the hill,
 Shooting its muffled lightnings as it went,
 With thunder and sound of voices hoarsely
 blent—
 Loud shouts and short sharp cries from here
 and there
 Where struck a shot the life, and laid on
 earth
 A soldier quivering. And on its edge,
 Now and again, lithe figures sprang to sight—
 And vanished where the hazels swathed the
 boles
 Of mighty trees; or caught in surging smoke,
 Paled struggling in that limbo like a dream.

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And oft there passed the fleeting pantomime
Of clenched and struggling shapes that rolled
on earth,
With nimble limbs like serpents writhed and
tossed,
Knit in the last great grapple breast to breast.

The first live soul to issue from that cloud
Was a poor soldier flying from aloft,
Wild-eyed, bareheaded, wounded, weapon-
less,
A meteor of blood and suffering.
He fell, and gathering, rose and wavered on,
Now stumbling more than running toward
the spot
Where I stood fixed and straining. And he
saw—

He saw, and raised a feeble cry of cheer,
But then a stream of flame broke from above
And downward, and he stopped with staring
eyes.

An instant ere he sank in death before me,
Pierced through his breast. Then rose his
crouching foe
And flamed at him like sanguine Lucifer,
With cries of triumph, bearing high his blade
To rend away the trophy of his deed.
Then with its old impulsive eloquence
My weapon rose and spoke! and at the word
Down rolled the heathen howling—clutching
earth,
And showering leaves in awful agony—

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Ah! how the bright blood rainbowed from
his breast:—

A stroke well struck—alas, the only one
That fate permitted me to deal that day!
For see! The hanging cliff was all alive
With gliding forms and fearful visages
And streaming head-plumes! Then my soul
affirmed

The fated issue of that dark surprise
And fight so quickly finished;—naught alas,
Save luckless death or capture to my friends,
Whose weapons spoke no more, whose shouts
were still,

Whose enemies in wanton victory
Ranged everywhere! One instant desperate
Remained wherein to fly before the storm,
Or else to stay and die amidst the storm—
Such was the choice. With madness in my
soul

Yet loving life, I thrust my weapon by,
That fate to many a foeman, and my friend
Approved and true;—gift of my ancestor
Whose deeds in former wars had made it
famous,

Famed fighter, famous weapon!—cast aside
My ox-horn flask, and leathern pouch with
balls,

Plucked out the heavy war-axe from its rest
And lingeringly released it from my hand,
Till all disarmed save for one slender blade
Clasped firm I stood; then glancing warily

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An instant, prying forth for shadowing
forms,
And naught discerning, slipped I down the
path,
Brushing the foliage lightly; then leapt out,
Long, like a hunted buck when stretch the
hounds
Red-mouthed upon his track; and speeding
raised
My voice and rang aloud along the plain—
“Fly for your lives! The foe is at your
doors!
Fly to the fort!” to warn the villagers.
I never reached the fort, though,—luck, or
fate,
Or some ill influence that dogs mens’ steps,
Had writ me down unfortunate that day!
For scarce my feet found me amid the plain,
Running with every nerve stretched, arms
a-play,
My spirits up and dancing, courage high,
And passion all enlisted for the heat,—
When there! a hazel thicket by the course
Let out three lurking heathen on my front,
And snapped the glorious race short! One
that hopped
Out of his covert like an evil toad—
A hunched black creature with malignant
eye—
Up-swung a firearm and the flame sprang
out;
And I sank down upon my wounded limb

Stung by the hissing missile, for a moment
Surprised and shocked, not knowing well my
hurt.

As boys a sapling under some fierce gust,
Doubled to earth—to spring again and
stand,

I fell to rise again; and met my foes
With one slim blade, hot-hearted for the
strife

Of skill and warrior courage to the end.

But ere a blow was struck, amid the pause
Defiant, filled with flying hateful glances,
A tall wild warrior limbed like Hercules,
With boyish gesture flung his weapon down,
And lightly leaping, coiled himself about
me,

Tying my limbs in tangles of lithe strength,
And bowed me down to earth. As a har-
vester

Grapples a sheaf of maize within his arms,
And struggling, binds its summit with a band
Of twisted straw, then bowing swings it clear
And lays it with its fellows on the earth,
So on the earth, unfellowed, laid he me.

There his grim mate with foul and greedy
hands

Bound fast my limbs with cords, that 'twixt
his teeth

Hung loosely dangling, waiting such an end.
Then both arose and looked upon me there
In mocking triumph. Then the hunchback
plucked

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My dagger from the grass, and whetted it
Upon his earth-soiled moccasin awhile,
Eyeing me as a butcher eyes a sheep
Laid bound for slaughter. Ceasing, up he
 sprang,
And flashed the steel in my eyes, extravagant
In cries and shows of triumph.

So

 I lay
Bound in the presence of my enemies.

It was a thing most wonderfully done!
I never saw aught like it in the world,
Amid the arts and cunning slights of force
Long practiced in the handicraft of war.
My heart cried shame upon me then, and
 tears,
The first to dim my eyes for many a day,
Flowed to reproach my fallen estate—that I,
A famous wrestler in my college days,
A man of action, and on many fields
Since then triumphant in my power of limb,
Should yield at last my prestige in the art
To that wild fellow of the woods, untaught,
With naught but simple nature for his friend.
And yet amid my sore humility
I did admire the deed! It pleased me so
That I forgave the fellow on the spot
With all my heart, it was so bravely done!
A few swift words in their ungente tongue,
Complete with glancing eyes and waving
 arms,

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Passed 'twixt my captors. Then the giant
took

His weapons, beckoned to his chosen mate,
A wild and sinewy creature like a wolf,
Who followed; and the pair with secret steps
Passed silently from sight. And then ap-
proached

Once more that bunch of deep deformity,
And cut away my feet-bands with a stroke,
And wide they flew recoiling at the touch;
And with the hateful menace of a spear
And horrid-mingled speech, he bade me rise,
Pointing with crooked finger up the slope.
And I arose and like a tortoise passed
Before him up the track and o'er the way
My feet erewhile had spurned like a proud
stag,

Printing the outrolled tablet of the path
With characters of blood; and all the while
My brain a fire, my spirit brewing gall
I labored on; and soon with limbs rebound
Lay, scarce a man, beneath the ancient pine
Where gushed the spring of crystal from the
bank—

A vein of pearl by moonshine, but in the sun
A darting snake of gold that rustling ran
Down briary cleft of hillslope to the plain.
I lay and watched it from my rugged couch
Awhile, half-pleased and soothed to see it
flow,

Bearing my heart a moment on its wave.

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Soon sounds were heard above me on the
rock,
Voices confused, and shuffle of moving feet,
And ring of arm that clanged on fellow arm
Flung rudely down. But all I heard un-
moved,
Being downcast and captive. But my guard
Grew restless at the signs, and flew aside
Often to view the scene, as oft returning
With looks more dark and vicious; till at last,
O'ercome by restless longing like a child,
Fretful at aught that bars him from his wish,
He vanished up the crag, leaving behind
His spear and one wild warning glance of
eye
Shot backward as he passed. I gave no look,
But lay until his last limb disappeared
Withdrawn across the brink. 'Twas then
with pain
And utmost struggle that I rose and stood,
Supported by the pine tree's friendly
strength—
How burned the cords like fire into my
flesh—
And looked at level range across the plot
Brought even with my gaze—It was a sight
To stir the soul with wrath, disgust and
hate—
To fill the heart with curses, not with prayers,
The mouth with prayers that were naught
else but curses;
To wake a drowsing demon in the breast

DEATH OF MAID McCREA 33

To thrills of fiendishness that puts to shame
The thing divine in man. A company
Foul-handed with the blood of gallant souls
Were there and flourishing around a heap
Of battle-trophies, which their greedy hands
Had stripped from slaughtered bodies of
brave men

And they my comrades! Garments soaked
in blood

Were there, and many a weapon with its steel
Dimmed by the dust of battle, as it fell
From some strong soldier's grasp, struck in
mid-heat

Of fiery onset. One slim blade I saw
Snapped at the point and crimsoned to the
hilt!

And in the throng were some that crawled
about

On wounded limbs, the furnace of their hate
Seven times more heated by the fires of pain.
And oft some frenzied spirit in the band
Would pluck a loathly object from his girdle,
And shake the fearful trophy in the air,
Whereon responsive cries broke from the
throng,

Filling my spirit with loathing. Back I sank
Upon the kindlier earth, all sick at heart,
And all my soul offended at the sight.
The ring of coming footsteps now were
heard

34 DEATH OF MAID McCREA

Climbing the path behind me, though the
leaves

Hung thick before the way, and mixed o'er-
head,

Shut out the panting climbers from my sight.

A hope my soul had harbored while I lay

Helpless, with prayers for vengeance on our
foes,

Sprang forth alive at these oncoming sounds,

And broke the dear news to my panting
heart—

This was the looked-for succor from the
camp—

Alas, that never came! The foliage

That draped with green the shining vestibule

Of that resplendent temple so defiled,

Was shaken for a space as by a breeze,

Then parted, and my conqueror appeared

With some behind him. It was then I saw

The first true act of savage gallantry

My eyes had ever seen. A step aside

He made and paused, and gracefully with
his hand

Drew back the plaited foliage from the path,

And let two ladies through. The first that
came

Was Jennie, issuing from the tender shade

In all her maiden glory;—like the sun

O'ermounting in his course victorious

Through heaven the cloud that barred his
early beams.

The morning exercise had spread a flush

Of rosy warmth upon her fairest face;
 Her bonnet now was off, and from her
 head—

That strong proud head she carried like a
 queen—

Even from her low brow backward o'er her
 crown

And down her back until its crinkled gold
 Straying, trailed up the pathway as she came,
 Rolled down in glorious billows that great
 hair.

I looked upon her face—there was no shade
 Of fear that marred the glory of its charm,
 But in her lovely eyes, and on her cheeks

A fire of splendid indignation burned;
 And on her lips, proud-curved and beautiful,
 Abode a soul of scorn unspeakable,

The judgment of a proud imperial heart
 Offended. . . . Painfully behind her came

Her friend and hostess, wearily ascending,
 Above whose shoulder as she came two eyes
 Shone ominous of a captor at her back.

Young eyes see all;—and so the maiden's
 glance

Sweeping the space soon found me where I lay
 Bound and unmanned against the tree's wide
 trunk;

And swift of step, defiant of restraint,
 She came and looked and knew, then kindly
 smiled,

And spoke with maiden diffidence and said—

36 DEATH OF MAID McCREA

"May I speak for a moment?—we are cap-
tives

And need to cheer each other. How those
bonds

Must hurt you, drawn with such inhuman
rigor;

Had I a knife, I'd cut them in the face
Of yonder savages, and let you go.—

You might flee down the hillside and escape."

"Not while you staid a captive, gentle maid,"

The soldier in me answered; and her eyes
Sparkled at that, while warmer glowed her
cheek.

And then she bent above me till some locks
Of her great hair fell forward o'er her breast
And touched my own with blessing; then
spoke low

"Fear not for us at all, we shall not suffer!
These creatures dare not harm us if they
would;

Their master is the English Commandant,
Cousin and friend of my kinswoman here;—
They take us to the English camp:—farewell;
When safely there we shall remember you."

O tender light of woman's sympathy
Shining in that dark place!

A

moment more

And all were passing onward up the path
Around the rock's blunt angle to the plot,—
A rugged path for tender feet to tread,

Rough, hard, and stony cruel!—O I wished—
I wished and longed, but could not, being
bound,

To ease them on—it was but natural,
One loves to smoothe the pathway for a friend!

And as they vanished, winding round the
rock,

I felt that awful sinking of the soul
Once more surprise me, that I oft had felt,
Sometimes on battle fields, sometimes in camp,
And often on the water of the deep,
Forerunning some disaster, woe or death
To one I loved the best in all the world.

'Tis strange how often we are made to bear
In terror in the secret of our souls
Life's dark calamities ere they befall.

They gained the plot and halted. Then a
shout

Vociferous from savage throats arose
In greeting to their chief. And then the chiefs,
Grave and subdued, apart upon the rock,
Assembled in dark conclave,—motionless
Except for lips and eyes unresting moved
In energy of speech, or glances shot
Oft toward the fort with looks significant,
And oft upon the captives. And among them,
First in authority and eloquence,
Presided my wild captor—Wyondotte,
Surnamed The Panther, terror of whose deeds
With torch and tomahawk had filled the land

38 DEATH OF MAID McCREA

With a brood of shuddering rumors. . . .
Brief the council
And soon dissolved: and mixing with the men
By mingled speech and sign, the chiefs made
known
Their purpose. Then stood forth two men of
brawn,
But mild, and innocent of battle stain
Or show of human trophy, and addressed
In broken speech but still unbroken signs,
And not ungentle art and emphasis,
The elder captive, pointing toward the north
With often outstretched arm and liberal air
Of signified assurance. But the dame
Returned no word nor moved, but stood bow-
ed down
As if absorbed in her calamity.
And oft she sighed and deep, like one o'er-
spent
With toil or utmost grief. A little while
She so remained, and then she raised her
head,
With stern and flashing eyes set on her foes,
And opening at once her heart and lips,
Poured out with marvelous mastery of tongue
A shower of indignation on the band,
Till every one shrank awestruck from that
speech
Whose fire and thrust wrought havoc with
their wits,
And overthrew each warrior where he stood

With wondering admiration. Cowed, subdued,

By such unwonted thunder in their ears.

They changed as it went on their art and craft

To win obedience to their design

From this reluctant captive,—cringed and crawled

In awkward forms of savage blandishment.

And flatteries unpracticed by their kind.

“O you are gallant warriors, every one!

How nobly you have triumphed over us

Weak women! In the house where you surprised us

Remain a black slave and a babe concealed.

Draw out your bravest warriors and send forth

And bring them, and complete your victory!

You cowardly base creatures! who from ambush

Of tree or rock shoot unsuspecting men

You fear to meet in battle! Had we arms

Other than nature gave us—gun or sword—

We two, and women, here upon this rock

Would turn upon you, cowards that you are.

And beat you back among the bears and wolves

Who drove you out to war on weaker flesh!

You say you will not slay us!—we believe you.

40 DEATH OF MAID MCCREA

Women cannot resist you, wherefore slay
them?

Better to sell them in your master's camp
For gold with which the deeper to debase
Your lives, already baser than the dregs
And scum of living nature!—no, not sell,
But yield for ransom—that's a better phrase,
But that is white, a turn of English speech
Coined by your masters. Call it something
else!

Has your rich tongue no term for such a
deed? . . .

Go with you? No! You cannot budge me
hence

One step against my will; and carry me

Ye cannot. Nature has provided me

A frame ye cannot stir! . . . And you
would part

This dear child from me, lest we being to-
gether

Should comfort one another! I have heard
Of beings so inhuman, but till now

I never looked on such . . . I cannot
hope

To vie in talk with you, and speak out all

My heart about you. Nature has withheld

From me the gift of speech,—I am content

Since she has favored you therewith! Talk on,

And let your virtues blossom in your speech

That wither in your acts! . . . And if
I go

Pray whither will you lead me? But why
ask!

Do I not know already? Where is gold
But in the English camp wherewith to buy
Unfortunate captives?—you would take me
thither.

Beelzebub was aye a blunderer,
And you do honor to your ancestor
By keeping his tradition! Take me then
Forthwith at his command! My ancestor
He had a kinsman who was ancestor
Of a certain English soldier, commandant
Now of his Majesty's battallions camped
But one league hence. And I his kinswoman,
And loyal subject of his liege, the king
Of England and these glorious provinces,
Consent to be led to him, bound and shamed,
A miserable captive! Your reward
Will doubtless much surprise you when it
comes!—

You do not understand? Oh, well, I said
Lead on, but slowly as you can. Much gold
Shall pay you for my safe delivery. . . .
Farewell sweet Jenny; it is hard to part
Thus torn by force asunder; but be brave,
We'll meet for better luck in yonder camp!"

Thus their persuasions triumphed, and the
pair

Assumed her escort, moving leisurely,
And sought the broader highway pointing
east,

Along the steep hill's foot; and so were gone.
And as they passed, my eyes from the pursuit

42 DEATH OF MAID McCREA

Flew back to the rock where hovered all my
fears
Like birds among the branches, when the
snake
Comes crawling toward the nest. Upon that
rock
Conspicuous amid the wilderness,
With those wild scenes and faces witnessing,
These children of two races, white and red,
The maiden and the warrior, with a sword
Extinguishing between them, stood apart
And gazed upon each other. . . . May
his race
Melt from the white man's march as sank his
gaze
Before those eyes of steadfast innocence
Judging his lawless soul.

Meanwhile

the sun
All bright till then and shining in his strength,
Making a world of magic with his beams,
Suddenly darkened; and a wind arose,
Unheard before, and wailing filled the wood
With mournful tones, and sinking swept the
ground,
Shaking the leaves and trailers on the stones,
And whispering round the tree-trunks drearily
As if it knew and grieved. Amid the trees
The merry birds ceased suddenly their songs
And fled with cries into the darkened air,
Borne far in startled beves out of sight.

Away in forest depths some wandering wolf
Howled twice and ceased; and some distress-
éd beast

Within a far-off farmyard raised its voice
And lowed disconsolate to the darkened
sky.

And through my life and blood a dull chill
crept;

And o'er my soul a deep foreboding cloud
Closed by degrees, and was not lifted more
Till that dark evil drawing to a head
Discharged itself in blood upon the land.

There rose an instant tumult on the rock,
Like shouts of drunken soldiers when a town
Is sacked, and riot roars amid the streets,
Urged on by lust of plunder and vile
drink

Concocted for man's evil. And I saw
The storm of lawless passion break and rage,
'Mid brutal violence, and strife of tongues
Not wanting coarsest poison; eddying gusts
Distinct with writhing forms and tossing
arms;

And round the circle playing here and there
The sullen lightning from hate-heated eyes.
And stayed against my faithful tree I stood,
While all the man within me cried aloud
In urgent protestation 'gainst my bonds
No power of mine could rend,—although I
strove

With strength by passion trebled. All in vain;

44 DEATH OF MAID McCREA

The cord was trusty, and the knot stood sure
Against all might. Ah, had my eyes been
swords,

My heart, my soul, my impulse deadly spears,
What tide of slaughter then had swept the
plot,

What vengeance washed it clean of every
foe!

And meantime is the midst the maiden stood,
Like some large-molded statue aureoled
That lifted up in fair tranquility,
Blanched a degree, but steadfast, contem-
plates

The passionate gusts that flourish round its
base.—

A moment!—Then upon the storm's black
rim

A weapon slowly rose with level gleam,
Hung there an instant set and ominous
Ere the wild shot screamed out. A leaping
flame,

A gush of livid smoke, and I beheld
The maid start suddenly, as if surprised
At the hurt done her; saw her shining head
Drop with its crown of glory on her breast;
I heard a long deep sigh as of a soul
Passing to quiet rest; and sinking down
She lay a lovely ruin on the earth,
All overflowed with her great wave of hair.
And then I saw a hatchet whirl in air
And fall upon that poor defenseless head
Scarce yet insensible,—yea and I saw

A savage hand twined in those sacred locks,
 A hell-lit face above, a glitter of steel,
 And then—and then I saw no more! I barred
 With burning lids my eyes against the sight,
 And turned and laid me on the earth and
 wept,—

As I weep now! Forgive me if I weep;
 It helps the heart to grieve a little while;
 The sluice of tears drains off the flood of woe,
 And saves the heart from too much mem-
 ory,—

The memory of that deed unparalleled
 In all the annals of this bloody land
 Since history began!

O there goes forth

A cry that shall be quiet never more,
 A voice to speak unto the years unborn—
 A voice proclaiming judgment, and a power
 To trouble thrones, cast reputations down,
 Beyond wide seas, in other alien lands
 Our arms can never reach, our laws remold,
 Our justice rectify. That voice was heard
 A war-cry thrilling through the patriot souls
 On Saratoga's field; and flying on
 It sounded wild o'er Yorktown, and gave
 back

The eagle to our hosts. On ocean's plain
 It sounded solemnly amid the roar
 Combined of wind and wave and bellowing
 guns,
 Filled with heroic madness the strong souls

46 DEATH OF MAID McCREA

Of seamen, till another answering cry,
Again of victory, ran on the waves,
Bearing the news to every land o'er sea
That Freedom stooping from her spendid
 heights
Had lifted up our country to her realm.

THE LOVER'S TRAGEDY

THE LOVER'S TRAGEDY

The lamp is out long since upon that play;
The actors have departed one by one
Home through the darkness. I alone remain,
A straying shape upon the fading edge
Of that receding drama. Out of time
And out of place amid the alien clash
Of newer interests, I stay awhile,—
A foreigner amid the now and new,—
Until the tale is told I only know,
Who only live to tell it—then I go.

You who were pleased to listen for awhile
To my wild story of the gentle girl
Dead in the dimness of the lonesome woods,
Listen—more briefly—to its kindred tale
And climax, named the Lover's Tragedy.

Remember, when again with sorrowing eyes
I looked on things around me from my place,
All that mysterious darkness had withdrawn.
Again the sun burned full and warm in
 heaven,
Once more the birds sang in a thousand trees;
The squirrel skipped and sported on his limb,
And cast the empty refuse of his feast
With clattering jibes upon me where I lay,
Then sped with nimble scampering out of
 sight,

Amused at his own wit and my disgrace.
 A tuning breeze hummed quaintly in my ears
 Making the leaves shake lightly, while the sun
 Speckled the rich turf under them with
 gold.—

Nature, who closed her eyes on that dark
 deed,
 Refusing to behold it, now was gay,
 And made her Sabbath music as before.

Ah me! I scarcely knew what next they did,
 Save that they spared me;— spared my
 broken life,
 While they had rent my heart and stunned
 my brain,
 And stabbed my suffering spirit through and
 through
 With twice the pains of death. They loosed
 my bonds,
 And bade me rise—not spitefully indeed,
 Even a little pitifully it seemed—
 And I arose and made attempt to walk
 With such poor progress as on limbs be-
 numbed

A man might make along so rough a way.
 And I was stunned in head and intellect,
 And moved as one who walks amid a sleep,
 Scarce feeling pain or pleasure. Everything
 Seemed strangely dim and dusky round me
 now,
 And faint and dream-like. All the pleasant
 sounds

And gladsome sights that charmed the summer wood
Came to me through some baffling medium
That cloaked the senses.

So we passed
along,
My captors strangely temperate with me
In my loose pace and stumblings to and fro
With feet benumbed and heedless. Yet they
kept
Ever beside me, gliding dim and dark
Like demons in a nightmare—creeping,
creeping,
So dumb and constant; it was terrible—
Truly they seemed like devils!

Slow we went
Under the cooling shade, o'er leaf-floors
spread
To deaden more our footfalls; till ere long
Around a thrust of tangled torrent-bed
We broke upon the dame and her tall guards,
Trav'lers more slow than we upon the road
That ran we knew not whither. Yet was she
Still bright of eye and strenuous of soul,
And trod complainingless upon her way.
I thought she paled a little when she saw
Our band with but one prisoner in the midst,
And that the one least present in her
thoughts,—
Perhaps she questioned me by some mute
sign,

But I was stunned and dreaming, knowing
 naught,
 And she bore bravely onward as before.

At length we reached a cabin hid in woods,
 Log-built and brown, with hospitable look,
 A forest inn with loungers round the place,—
 White men and red who wakened as we
 came,

And gathered close and gazed, but nothing
 said,—

And dogs and children playing round the
 porch.

And here we stayed and rested from our toil,
 Took food, and such rough comfort as we
 might

Being downcast and captive and reserved
 For what more ill we knew not;—yes, and
 I—

At least I cared not! Earth had now for
 me

No fate I cared to question or to know,
 So weary was my life of all things here
 In this the sickness of a soul o'erwrought.
 'Mid comings and 'mid goings all that day
 Of horse and foot—the kinds that use the
 paths

Through wilds of scarce-delivered solitudes
 In new unordered lands, we staid at rest,
 And unmolested, save they suffered not
 The grace of speech between us. And all
 night,

Through supernatural hush within, without,
 We slept, and woke and sorrowed, slept
 again,
 And woke at last into another day.

Soon as the morn was perfect came our guards
 Around us, while we ate our early meal;
 And when 'twas done they led us forth again
 In silence to the highway, where we turned
 Once more our faces toward the haunted tract
 Where sunk in woods lay deep our unknown
 goal.

And now our captors grew more frank and
 kind,
 Somewhat more human and articulate,
 And not ungently strove to cheer us up,
 Speaking in words and signs of camps and
 friends,
 Of ransoms and of coming liberty,—
 Themes, as they thought, to buoy a captive
 up,
 And light an eye-gleam in the senseless skull
 Of rank misfortune;—unto me all vain,
 Too heart-sick to rejoice at anything;
 Too worn with all this seeming senseless
 strife,
 Of all this noisy war of arms and tongues,
 These endless themes of battles, battles,
 battles,
 Of marches, sallies, camps and victories

Forever on men's tongues!—sick of the
land—

Sick of the land and all its miseries,
And even of life and all that life disclosed!
And my companion in captivity,
She was too angry still to heed them much,
Or answer if she heeded.

When the sun
Burned through the loftier tree-tops on the
right

And glanced upon the path with bashful rays,
And well nigh half the summer day was done,
We broke the pact of that green lonely world,
And saw the land sink suddenly, engulfed
Amid a tract of cedar-shadowed soil—
The scarce-healed wound of some old torrent-
stroke

In some far time when all the world was new.

And there beneath us lay the English camp,
Dotting a low knoll with its clustered tents
Like cones of fleece amid the blackened wreck,
And brown earth scorched by fire. Around
were walls

Of cedar-shade impenetrably wild
And dim and lonesome. 'Twas a pretty sight,
Touching the soul with a reviving sense
Of cheerful life and human fellowship
Succeeding that dim march with souls bowed
down

Under the pressure of captivity.
And as I looked it seemed as if I saw,

Instead of tents that sheltered mortal foes,
 A camp of angels with celestial tents
 Pitched in the heart of the great wilderness,
 Gleaming a moment, soon to be withdrawn.

Our captors shouting, then discharged in air
 Their ready weapons; for their march was
 done,
 Their danger past, their triumph nigh complete.

And from the camp's rear rose an answering
 cry,

And there came streaming forth a troop of
 friends—

Friends of our foes—God help us, not of
 ours!—

With cries and leapings, like a pack of dogs
 Flying with yelps and gambolings of joy
 To meet their kind returning from a raid
 Upon some innocent sheep-fold, bathed in
 blood

And mad with gust of slaughter—so they
 came.

A file of soldiers too were soon on foot,
 Flashing in steel and scarlet up the path;
 And as they came the clamorous dogs grew
 mute,

Ceased their vile gambolings and slunk away
 O'erawed and cowed. And those whose game
 we were

Submitted while the King's men filing round
 Enclosed and drew us from them. Silently

With pompous tramp they drew us down the
slope,

And round amid the white tents on our way,
To where a log-reared cabin capped with
bark

Appeared, the center of the clustered tents
Flecking the knoll. A sentinel in the path
Stood by at mute attention as we passed,
And eyed us with unmoving countenance.

Behind us trailed a line of shadowy forms,
Suffered to pass with that mute tolerance
That shadows claim which dog us every-
where;—

Nay, worse,—scorned and detested, so it
seemed,

With silent and significant neglect,
By these their bounden patrons, paymasters,
And nominal fair friends.

Ere long

we stood

About the door of the great general's lodge
Commanding these strong legions—men and
arms,

Marching with purple pride and waving flags
To crush the weak and nigh dejected few
Who bore the burden of this mighty cause—
The freedom of the people—on their swords.
The red guard parted right and left, and we
Passed in between them through the open
door,

My captive friend and I; and following still,

Our captors, mute but watchful. Then the
 guard
 Formed and wheeled off, a sergeant proud
 and tall
 Stepping with solemn dignity behind.

A low rude room it was wherein we stood,
 Divided in the midst by lagging folds
 Of royal curtains looped along their staff
 Like banners o'er an archway. All the walls
 Were cedarn beams yet shaggy with the bark
 Wherein they grew; and for a floor our feet
 Stood ankle-deep in bearskins loosely laid
 To hide the bare and black earth underneath.
 Around the place were banners, weapons,
 chests
 Carved, and with mighty clasps of brass
 thereon,
 Ancient, from over seas. There stood a desk
 Whereat a pale clerk in half-uniform
 Sat busy working at his documents,
 His head upon one side, with slanting eyes
 Upon the lines formed by his running quill.
 He quit his task, half turning in his seat,
 Viewing us sharply; smiled then half in scorn
 At such extreme dejection, "Ah," he said,
 "Prisoners, I see! Go, orderly, report
 Two prisoners to the general, and return."
 And turning to his documents again
 Wrote on. And the proud soldier at the door
 Obeyed, his saber clanking as he went.

Then passed a scene I never shall forget—
The strangest play considering time and place
My eyes had ever seen. . . . There entered now

Into the tent and circle through the door
Two men, pre-eminent by port and garb
O'er all the sorts encountered on our way,
Whose very air and attitude dispensed
The ether of authority.—The one,
Troubled of eye and careworn, moving slow;
The other young, prince-like, with flashing
eyes,

From whom flowed forth a heat impetuous
That signified a warrior sound of heart—
A fine dark fellow!

When within the lodge
They stood ere long, the elder from his place
Looked round about him, listlessly it seemed,
And scornfully reluctant toward the task
He saw full grown before him; till his eyes
Within their narrow circuit of survey
Found out the cowering dame.—Then all
was changed!

A soldier's lot finds out a man surprised
Full often; but surprises such as this
Seldom indeed:

“Why Madam!” he exclaimed,
And “General,” she replied, distinct and
short.

And furious from that greeting there arose
A storm of tongue and temper unapproached
In all my memory of wordy wars—

The crown and flower of female railery,
 Saved by just wrath from mere vulgarity
 Detestable to see. It was a sight,
 And not without its laughter, to behold
 That high commander, memorable of name,
 The court-be-dizened darling of the wars,
 Who never bowed before an enemy,
 Whipped in his tent by one wronged woman's
 tongue,

And she his kinswoman from over seas,
 Bound with his cause in soul and sentiment,
 A royalist outspoken from the heart!
 A doting lion hungering for prey
 Had pounced upon and caught a lioness!
 And now, Sir Lion, look you out for claws!
 Ay, and the claws were there; and suddenly
 Unsheathed, made havoc seven times more
 complete

Than sudden swords of alien and adversaries
 Whom courage might o'ercome.

“Sir,

stand and look!

This is a precious piece of gallantry,
 Right worthy of a royal officer
 And gentleman!”

’Twas thus the gale began,
 And gathered power and tumult as it blew,
 Drowning all apposition.

“By my word,”

“Upon the honor of a gentleman;” . . . ,

“Madam, I swear!” . . . “Permit me
 but a word;” . . .

"I never knew—indeed how could I
know;" . . .

"I beg you stop and let me say a word;" . . .
Twigs in the wind! 'Twas wonderful to note
What gusts of words, what flashes scintillant
Of keen sarcastic lightning; shattering bursts
Of most authentic thunder; what sharp
thrusts

Of darting irony dealt thick and fast,
One following on another like a glance,
Poured from the fiery heart and stormy lungs
Of that great titaness! . . .

And ended all
In one great cry that filled the tent and shrill-
ed,
Piercing all ears—

"Oh there stand
murderers here!
Ask them of Jenny—ask of Maid McCrea!"
And then the true warm woman in her heart
O'ercame at last her rage, and she sank down
Silent, and like a woman all in tears.
And then the tongue-stunned chief, remem-
bering

His breeding and his magnanimity,
Brought forth a cloak of folds voluminous
And gallantly as ever soldier could
Laid it about the shoulders of the dame,
Beseeching her to wear it for a time
Till, in his thought, a fitting robe be found
To better clothe her form. And she arose

Muttering short thanks, and shaking down
the folds

Sat down again, her soul immersed in thought.
And then the clerk, whose pen had quit its
task

Upon the outbreak of that wordy war,
His eyes meanwhile brimful of sparkling fun
And overbubbling humor scarce restrained,
Resumed his quill and scratched on as before.

The general, mild and all obsequious,
Complacent with his tact and management,
Stood rubbing hands vivaciously. Behind,
Unmoved—impervious, ranged along the
wall,

The Indians stood like shadows darkly
limned,—

But shadows with live eyeballs, now and then
Slanting their dusky glimmer, half at rest;—
Patient, on foot taking their wonted ease.

And every mind took on a sense of calm,
And every heart conceived a welcome touch
Of human fellowship; and every face
Softened to looks of comfort and content
At this subsidence;—every face save one,
And that was white and anxious, as the man
Moved ceaselessly about the tent's curt space,
Restless of eye. A panther might have
moved

Thus while the brush stirred with the hunters'
steps

Closing the hunt around him. As he paced

His glances played in an incessant search
 Betwixt the dame and those dumb witnesses
 Ranged 'gainst the wall with looks inscrutable.
 Was this the soldier whom my eyes had marked

ed
 Just now with admiration—princely then
 With all a graceful carelessness—but now
 With soul strained like a bowstring while it
 trembles

Tense for the shaft? A little this went on;—
 Then burst the prisoned soul forth into speech
 And action, shattering the shallow crust
 Of calm o'erlying that profoundest pit
 Of heart-convulsion. For, with eyes on fire,
 Great in the splendor of his agony,
 He strode to meet this last of enemies—
 The knowledge hid to master him and throw
 His life adrift upon the waste of years.
 Swift was the stride that brought him to the
 dame,

Fierce almost was the passion of the hand
 He laid upon her shoulder. And he stood
 Above her muffled shape with burning eyes,
 And in her ear with note imperious
 Heard by all ears beside.

“Tell me of her;
 Speak quickly, I command you—What of
 her!”

And then the answer came, but not from lips
 Of any speaking creature. While he spoke
 Three wild and warlike figures foul with dust

And soil of darker stain, came gliding in
 And pausing rolled their restless eyeballs
 round;

Silent, constrained in that high company,
 Yet fierce with gleams of triumph breaking
 through.

And as the soldier turned and faced them
 there,

One, a wild creature, brawny like a wolf,
 Raised a strange thing he had, held it aloft,
 And with a foul forefinger significantly
 Tapped it and smiled—a grim inhuman
 smile—

Even for a savage strange and hideous.
 Then from behind there rose a fearful cry,
 A woman's cry of anger and despair;
 As when a lioness, returned from hunt
 All day for prey to feed her little ones
 Hungry within their covert, comes at night
 And scents the bodies of her little ones
 Slaughtered by hunters; and in rage and
 grief

Peals through the wastes her desolated cry,
 So cried the dame and rose, her mighty frame
 Aquiver, and her eyes aflame, her hand
 Pointing—"O, see!—That is our darling's—
 that—

O they have slain—have slain our innocent:—
 O were there but a man here to avenge
 That deed! And then by burning instinct
 spurred

She moved upon the savage;—needless now,

64 THE LOVER'S TRAGEDY

Because there stood a man and lover there,
David, beloved by the gentle girl
So loved—then martyred now immortalized!
“That thing my darling’s—that—” he stood
and said

In mournful echo of the words the dame
Had cried from out her stormy agony.
And thus he stood and gazed bewildered
there—

Bewildered for a moment, but no more!
For then there fell and sure and sudden
stroke

That rolled the savage gasping to the floor,
Where like a whirlwind passed a furious
strife

Between those fiery warriors white and red;
One bent on vengeance deadly in its aim,
And one, with wily art and ready tact
Evading that one end. From side to side
They over and over rolled, until the tent
Shook, and the bearskins flew this way and
that

Among the circling spectators, disturbed
With panic, this way dodging and then that,
To shun the writhing bodies. Thus the strife
Went on; and when 'twas finished there arose
A soldier breathless, haggard, wild and torn,
And in his white right hand that fearful
gage—

That fearful, beauteous gage of strife locked
fast—

The maiden’s crown of glory, her bright hair!

And then he staggered panting through the
lodge,
And found a seat and sat, his face bowed
down
And sunken in his hands in utter woe.
And there he staid awhile; then stirred and
passed
A hand across his brow, and o'er his face,
And groaned aloud in searching agony.
Like an unresting spirit for a time
He sat and stirred:—then suddenly arose
And groped toward the tent-door, till an arm
Was lent in pity, and he leaned on that,
And passed from sight, a broken ruined man.

Once when that night I left my prison tent
And stood within the moon's light, with the
stars
Above that secret deadly wilderness
Flashing their kindly beacons from above;
And the wind sighing mournful 'mid the tents,
And a far creature crying in the depths—
Upon the outmost edge of clustered tents
Where the dark earth fell off to blacker
shades
Of dense morass with cedar crownéd glooms,
I saw within the sad flood of the moon
A night-companioned wanderer pass my place,
Who when he saw me standing slipped aside
And sought the shelter of a distant tent.

And thus forever wandering without rest,

66 THE LOVER'S TRAGEDY

From land to land, from place to place he
 goes,
Companioned by his soul's deep memories;
And for his eyes' sight, with him evermore—
Inseparably present where he is,—
Memorial glorious of his earthly love,
The maiden's crown of glory, her bright hair.

And like as I beheld him on that night
Shall he pass restless, lonely through the
 world,
Till death's still tent receives him from the
 night.

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